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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1270  
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000310

SIPDIS

AF/C FOR LISA KORTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [GB](#)

SUBJECT: GABON: ANNULLED SCHOOL YEAR AVERTED... FOR NOW

REF: A. A: 09 LIBREVILLE 00281

[1](#)B. B: 09 LIBREVILLE 00220

Classified By: POLOFF Christopher Gunning for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) The possible annulment of the 2008-2009 school year was resolved between the teachers and Gabonese Government on June 27. President Omar Bongo had been the arbiter of union demands and ended most lingering strikes. Without his intervention, the teachers' strike continued until the Prime Minister's office intervened. The most recent teacher strike, started on May 25 and which threatened to prematurely end the school year, was suspended by the teacher's unions on June 27. On June 29, teachers returned to the classrooms in anticipation that some of their demands for the government to pay overdue bonuses will be met. While the possibility of an annulled school year looks to have been avoided in the short-term, if the teacher's demands are not met they will continue to press their concerns into the next school year. End Summary.

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Specter of the Lost School Year- Delayed  
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[1](#)2. (U) Public school teachers in Gabon were on strike multiple times throughout the 2008-2009 school year, with the most recent prolonged strike beginning on May 25. Due to the teacher's strikes, students missed a large portion of the school year and were facing the possibility that the entire year would have been annulled (referred to as [L](#)'annee Blanche in French). In the past, even the threat of an annulled school year has led to large demonstrations and protests.

[1](#)3. (U) On June 27 the Government of Gabon met with the members of the National Primary and Secondary Teachers Union (SENA in its French acronym) and the largest teachers union, CONSYSED. The teachers' organizations demanded that the Gabonese Government pay a series of bonuses that were promised in 2008 (ref tel B). The government, represented by the Prime Minister's office, agreed to make every effort to pay the final outstanding bonuses and the Ministry of Education agreed to "take concrete steps" towards formalizing the pay bonuses into the teachers' contracts. The teachers agreed to return to the classrooms and did so on June 29. To make up for lost time, classes will continue through July and are likely to last into August

[1](#)4. (C) PolOff met with Mohammed Bashiri, head of UNESCO in Gabon. Bashiri said that he was "concerned" about the Gabonese media suggesting that UNESCO was the organization that declares [L](#)'annee Blanche. He noted that UNESCO only plays an advisory role to the Ministry of Education and could not dictate a policy decision like an annulled year. He

added that the Prime Minister's office came to Bashiri's office on June 26 "to discuss options" regarding the prospect of L'annee Blanche. Bashiri said that he described the pros and cons of such a move and advised against allowing the year to be annulled. Bashiri added that he believes his meeting with the Prime Minister's office was "an eye opener" for the government and may have helped push the government to an agreement with the teachers.

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Lingering Problems  
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¶5. (U) The Gabonese school system has narrowly avoided annulling the year numerous times in 2008 and 2009 (reftels A and B). While most of the bonuses were paid in early June and despite their agreement to return to the classrooms, SENA and CONSYSED claim that more than 1,000 teachers still have not received the bonus and that foreign teachers were not included in the payout. CENA and CONSYSED noted that they only "suspended" the strike, and are prepared to strike at the start the next school year if insufficient progress is made in meeting their demands.

¶6. (U) A point of continued confusion is the scheduling of national exams. The Ministry of Education did not revise the national exam schedule to account for the missed school days.

Initial registration for the exams was conducted on June 29 and continued on June 30 and many students missed the registration period due to uncertainty about the reopening of the schools.

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COMMENT  
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¶7. (C) If teachers stay in the classrooms until the end of the school year, a major stumbling block and possible source of civil unrest will be averted during the sensitive electoral timeline. Prime Minister Eyeghe Ndong's intervention in the situation appears to have been a necessary step since the teachers' union were used to dealing directly with deceased President Bongo and had no faith in the Ministry of Education. Unless all bonuses are paid, the threat of strikes will continue well into next school year.

End Comment.

REDDICK